



Raising Student Achievement:

A Standards of Learning Update

Virginia Board of Education
February 2002

Measuring Success

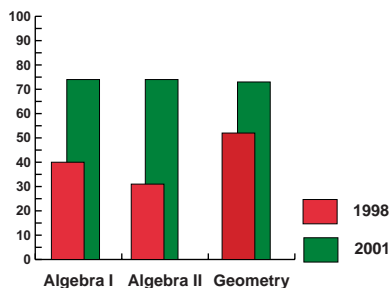
Virginia is raising student achievement by setting clear academic standards and measuring progress in meeting those standards through regular testing.

Students take Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in grades 3, 5, 8, and in high school. Since the first year of SOL testing in 1998, student achievement has increased on all tests, including double-digit increases on 23 of the assessments.

The performance of Virginia's students in 2001 improved on 25 of the 28 SOL tests compared with the results of tests administered in the spring of 2000. The improvement in 2001 was most pronounced on end-of-course tests that students must take to earn credit toward a high school diploma. For example:

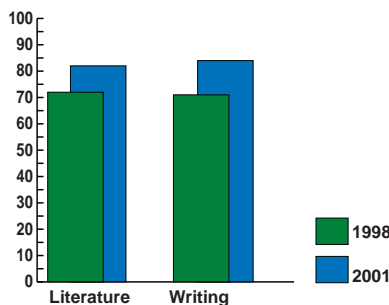
■ In Algebra I, the percentage of students passing was 74 percent in the spring of 2001, a gain of nine points over the 2000 rate and a 34-point increase since 1998, the first year of SOL testing.

■ The statewide pass rate for Algebra II was 74 percent, a gain of 16 points over the 2000 rate and a 43-point improvement since 1998.



■ The geometry pass rate was 73 percent, a gain of six points over the 2000 pass rate and 21 points since 1998.

■ In English/reading, 82 percent of students passed, a gain of 10 points since 1998.



■ In English/writing, 84 percent of students passed, up 13 percentage points from 1998.

These pass rates do not include high school students who passed tests after participating in remedial programs. The Board of Education has set no limit on the number of times a high school student may retake an SOL test needed for graduation.

Statewide pass rates on three of the 28 tests declined slightly compared with results from 2000. However, overall student performance on these tests remained well above the 70-percent mark, with 75 percent of students passing eighth-grade English writing and more than 80 percent passing fifth-grade computer/technology and high school English writing.

Improving Schools

Virginia's students are achieving more because the quality of instruction in Virginia's public schools is improving.

The Standards of Accreditation (SOA) give schools until 2007 to increase student achievement to specified levels in the core areas of mathematics, history, science, English. Hundreds of Virginia schools already have met or exceeded the eventual standard for full accreditation; hundreds of others have shown dramatic improvement. In 2001, for example:

■ 731 (or 40 percent) of Virginia's schools met the 2007 standard for academic achievement and are rated Fully Accredited.

■ Student achievement in 378 (or 21 percent) of Virginia's schools met or exceeded the 2007 standard for full accreditation in all but one subject area.

■ 558 (or 30 percent) of Virginia's schools are rated Provisionally Accredited/Meets State Standards, meaning that student achievement at these schools either met or exceeded 2001 progress benchmarks set by the Board of Education. Schools that meet these benchmark pass rates on SOL tests are counted as meeting the state's accreditation standards, even if they have not yet attained the 2007 standard for full accreditation.

Taken together, this means that seven out of ten Virginia schools met the 2001 standard for academic achievement.

Accreditation Status 2001-02

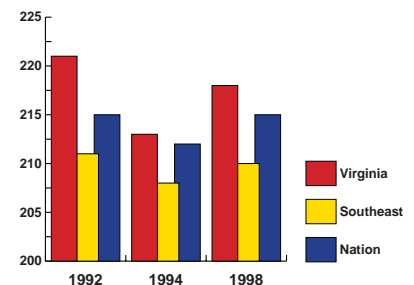


Verified Achievement

The increase in student achievement reflected in rising pass-rates on SOL tests is confirmed by the performance of Virginia students on a variety of nationally recognized assessments. Consider the following:

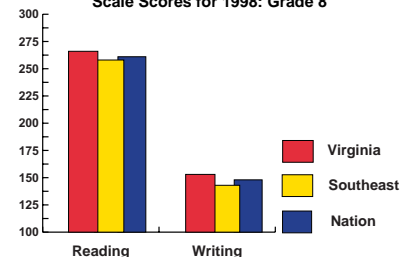
■ Since the adoption of the revised Standards of Learning in 1995, the average score of Virginia fourth graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test has risen five points and is now three points higher than the national average. This increase made up most of the ground lost between 1992 and 1994, when Virginia's average fourth grade reading score fell by eight points.

Average Reading Scale Scores: Grade 4

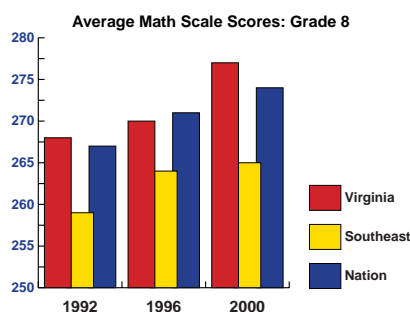
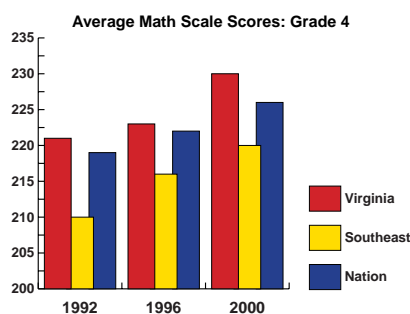


■ Virginia students outperformed students in the region and nation on the 1998 eighth grade NAEP reading and writing assessments. (1998 was the first year the NAEP state reading and writing assessments were administered in grade eight.)

Average Reading and Writing Scale Scores for 1998: Grade 8



- The scores of Virginia fourth graders on the 2000 NAEP science test were among the highest in the nation. The average scores of Virginia students in grades 4 and 8 exceeded the average scores for the nation and the southeast.
- The gains made by Virginia students on the 2000 NAEP mathematics tests are among the highest in the nation. The average mathematics score of Virginia's fourth graders has risen nearly eight points since 1996. Virginia's eighth-graders have made equally impressive gains.
- Seventy-three percent of Virginia's fourth graders performed at or above the basic level on the 2000 NAEP mathematics test compared with 62 percent in 1996 and 59 percent in 1992. The percentage of eighth graders performing at or above the basic level rose to 67 percent compared with 58 percent in 1996 and 58 percent in 1992.

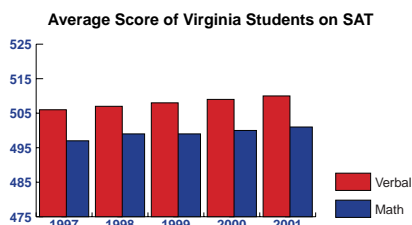


- The percentage of Virginia fourth and eighth graders performing at or above the proficient level in mathematics also increased on the 2000 NAEP tests. The performance of 25 percent of fourth graders was at or above the proficiency level compared with 19 percent in 1996 and 1992. Twenty-six percent of eighth graders performed at or above proficiency compared with 21 percent in 1996 and 19 percent in 1992.

- Minority students showed a marked increase in proficiency on the 2000 NAEP mathematics tests at both grade levels. The percentage of African-American students performing at or above the basic level rose by 12 points in grades 4 and 8. The performance of Hispanic students also improved significantly on the 2000 tests.
- Virginia fourth and sixth graders posted nearly across the board gains in reading, language, and mathematics on last fall's Stanford Achievement Tests (Stanford 9) compared with results from 1999. Virginia fourth graders advanced from the 57th to the 60th percentile in math, the 57th to the 60th percentile in language, and the 52nd to the 53rd percentile in reading. Sixth graders made similar gains, advancing from the 62nd to the 65th percentile in math and the 53rd to the 55th percentile in language. Sixth-grade achievement in reading remained at the 59th percentile, well above the national average.

- Virginia is one of three states recognized by the National Education Goals Panel as leading the nation in a key measure of student achievement. In its annual report, Promising Practices: Progress Toward the Goals 2000, the panel points to the dramatic increase in the number of Virginia students qualifying for college credit for their performance on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations as evidence that the commonwealth has made significant progress in raising student achievement.

- Virginia students' scores on the SAT improved in 2001 for the fourth consecutive year. The average score of Virginia seniors on the verbal portion of the SAT-1 test in 2001 was 510, compared with 509 in 2000, 507 in 1998 and 506 in 1997. The average score on the math portion of the test was 501, compared with 500 in 1999 and 1998, 497 in 1996. Virginia's seniors scored higher on the verbal portion of the SAT-1 than the national average. During the past five years, the number of Virginia students taking SAT-1 has increased by approximately 14 percent, from 42,047 students in 1996 to 47,773 students in 2000.



Public Confidence

The unprecedented increase in student achievement in Virginia since 1995 reflects the hard work of students and the efforts of thousands of creative teachers who have incorporated the Standards of Learning into rich and varied programs of instruction.

Accountability has shown a spotlight on Virginia schools most in need of assistance and fundamental change. These schools are receiving extra funding for remediation and are implementing improvement plans based on instructional strategies with proven track records of success. This combination of assistance and accountability is producing dramatic results in many schools once characterized by low achievement.

The 2001 Commonwealth Education Poll conducted by the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Public Policy shows that Virginians recognize how standards, accountability, and academic achievement are connected. The poll found that 60 percent of public school parents believe that the Standards of Learning have helped Virginia's public schools.

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*"By every measure, the
Standards of Learning are working.
Our students are making
tremendous progress and
are achieving at higher levels.
Their success is a testimony to
dedicated and creative teachers
who are making the standards work
for Virginia."*

*Mark C. Christie
President, Board of Education*
